

WASHINGTON –U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today called on President Barack Obama to kill a plan to bill veterans' private health insurance for combat injuries.

Mitchell, along with Representatives Glenn Nye (D-VA), Anne Kirkpatrick (D-AZ) and 57 of their colleagues, wrote to President Obama in opposition to the proposal.

"We do not give our veterans health care – they earn it," Mitchell and his colleagues wrote. "And it would be unacceptable for the VA to ask our veterans to pay for the treatment of injuries received while serving our nation in uniform."

Mitchell and his colleagues warned that the proposal could harm veterans and their families in Arizona and across the country by jeopardizing their health care and employment opportunities through increased health care premiums. It may also potentially discourage employers from hiring veterans. [Source: The Washington Post, March 18, 2009]

"We have a responsibility to our veterans," said Mitchell, who serves on the Committee on

Mitchell Calls on Obama to Kill Plans to Take Away Veterans Benefits

Tuesday, 17 March 2009

Veterans' Affairs and is Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "Our veterans gave themselves in service to our country and it is our obligation to deliver the health care and benefits that they have earned and deserve."

The full text of the letter to President Obama opposing the change to veterans' benefits is attached:

March 17, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama

President of the United States

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We first want to take this opportunity to thank you for the clear commitment your administration's budget outline makes to our nation's veterans. The proposed 10 percent increase in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for next fiscal year is truly historic. We believe the 2010 budget will ensure the VA never again faces the chronic under-funding that prevented countless veterans from receiving the health benefits they have earned.

While we strongly support your plans to increase funding for the VA by \$25 billion over the next five years, it is with equal conviction that we oppose the proposal to bill veterans' private health insurance plans for care and treatment of service-connected injuries or disabilities.

We do not give our veterans health care - they earn it - and it would be unacceptable for the VA to ask our veterans to pay for the treatment of injuries received while serving our nation in uniform. That responsibility belongs to the VA, and it would be wrong to outsource the

responsibility of covering the care of those veterans to private insurance companies.

Additionally, this proposal could harm our veterans and their families in unintended, yet very serious ways, jeopardizing their families' health care and even negatively affecting veterans' employment opportunities. Billing a veteran's private health insurance for the treatment of service-connected injuries could lead to increased health care premiums, and could potentially discourage employers from hiring veterans.

We know you are committed to expanding employment opportunities for veterans. Already this year, your administration and Congress have worked to create countless jobs for veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this proposal would undermine our efforts.

We urge you to take this proposal off the table, and let us instead focus on ensuring that our veterans receive the full care and benefits they have earned. The moral obligation our nation has to our veterans demands nothing less. We are happy to discuss these issues with you further as we move toward a final budget for the VA.

We would like to thank you again for your commitment to improving care for the men and women who have borne the battle, and who have sacrificed their health and well-being in serving their country. Thank you for your service to our nation.